1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbondu FP13

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102
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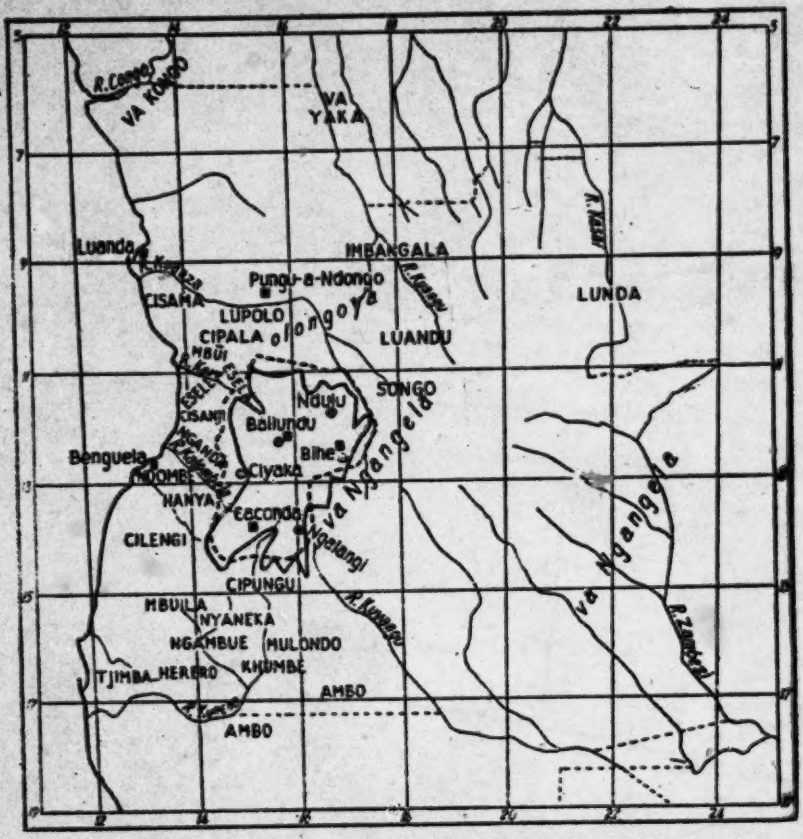


HABITAT OF THE OVIMBUNDU

AND THEIR POSITION WITH REGARD TO THEIR NEIGHBOURS

Heavy continuous line indicates elevation of 1,500 metres (4,920 ft.).
Broken line indicates limits of Umbundu territory.
© Leading capital villages (*olombala*). ■ Portuguese presidios.

[facing p. 1]

1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP 13 Mbundu FP 13

perhaps in Ndulu. In Ngendo the Men's Club had taken over the rocks just behind the headman's household for its meeting-place, but the meetings were only occasional and there was no common meal.

The Village Plan

To speak of the plan of an Umbundu village may seem a contradiction in terms, so haphazard seems the relation of houses, gardens, &c., to each other. Some houses are circular, but the majority are more nearly rectangular in shape. There is a palisade of hardwood sticks surrounding all the village except that side of the headman's household which is adjacent to the rocks used for a club-house. The headman had not bothered to keep up his own part of the fence since his only garden was a small tobacco plot fenced in by itself. The village is itself divided up by the palisades which shut off one compound from another, each compound containing the houses of from one to three households. Between the palisades are paths which lead on to the dancing floor and out of the village. In the village of Sekulu Sikilile there were twenty-five households with thirty-two houses in all. Each house (*onjo*) had its own granary (*osila*), and small chicken-coop built on stilts, and of all the houses only six had separate kitchens (*ociwo*). Nearly every household had separate pens for the pigs, goats, and sheep for the night. At one side of the headman's compound there was a common corral for the nine cattle which the villagers owned. Only the headman had a spirit-hut (*etambo*), used also for a storehouse, for entertaining a guest, and for his own bedroom should he sleep apart from his wives. Within the several compounds were small gardens of tobacco and of maize and beans, and just outside the village were two separate tobacco gardens. Just a few paces to the west was a small patch of wheat belonging to a man in the smallest ward. There was one household of two houses quite outside the palisades appropriately belonging to a man named *Kulika* (meaning 'Being-alone'). The water-holes and pounding rocks where meal was ground were between the several units of the village and were used in common. The fields were off to the east at from thirty minutes' to an hour's walk. The two smaller wards of Ciyanda and Kanjengo were so small that they were like two or three compounds by themselves. The former had six households with eight houses, and the latter

1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP 13 Mbundu FP 18

their own wards, 'my ward' (*ocitawila cange*). The other villagers will speak only of 'our village' (*imbo lietu*).

There are, in general, two quite different and distinct types of Umbundu village according to the terrain on which they are built. The villages of the plains have room to spread out and tend toward a circular shape, with the dancing floor and men's club house near the centre. The wards may appear as quarters of a single whole or they may be added on in haphazard fashion. The villages of the mountains must conform to the possibilities of the terrain. Formerly, many villages were built on mountains for defence, and capital villages of this type may still be seen with the houses built on ledges and rocks almost one on top of the other. In this type of village, there is often not sufficient or sufficiently good soil for even small garden plots within the palisades. Occasionally one of these mountain villages may be found which has not even room within it for the dancing floor, which will in this case be found outside the palisade. If the site is not too severely confined, the wards of the mountain village tend either to string themselves out horizontally along the mountain-side, or to find successive ledges. The village of Ngendo is of an intermediate type, built as it is, on a slope. Sikilile's village was first built as near the stream as possible. The wards later added themselves on, each a little higher than the one before. The school village, which was built last, got the highest and most hygienic site.

Moving a Village

Villages may be moved for any one of several reasons. When fields are worn out and others are not available[1] near by, a village may be moved to a site more conveniently located. More often, however, the reason assigned is that there has been much illness or death, that the old site is polluted, that its 'air is bad', which to the Ovimbundu means that some action displeasing to the spirits has been committed which has brought on these misfortunes. This will generally have been determined by divination, as will also the spirits' consent to the proposed new site. A site which has long been occupied is of course fertile soil. Since old sites are generally cultivated to good advantage this fact should not be overlooked as a possible additional reason for moving.

[1] Nowadays European settlement often pre-empts such lands.

1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbundu FP13

A few words from the childhood recollections of Paulino Ngonga Liahuka[1] bring out the facts.

One day we noticed that Sekulu Upalandanda[2] and my father went to the mountain of Kalilonge saying, 'We go to look around (and find out) whether the spirits (*olosande*) have agreed to our moving there.' Then another day we saw that the fathers were coming out of the spirit huts (*atambo*, plural), with the sacred chests (*ovimbangu*, plural), saying, 'We go to start a new village.' When they had arrived under the mountain of Kalilonge, they said, 'The spirits have agreed.' Then when everyone had moved, the elder, whose name had been Upalandanda at Muenesi, now changed his name, declaring, 'I am *Cilembo-camunda* (Shadow of Mountain). From that time the place was called Cilembo.

On seeking a new site the headman's fire in the old village is put out and the procession starts: a girl carries the sacred chest (*ocimbangu*) containing the relics (*ociye*) and the balls of iguana skin, and a boy the sacred bows.[3] They lead the way to the site selected where they cut a pole[4] suitable for a house-wall (*ekoso*), and tie a leaf of the *upu*[5] tree to it, dig a hole into which they put mud made by rain-water (*onata yondombo*),[6] and then together they lift the stick and let it fall into the hole. This is the beginning of the spirit hut (*etambo*), the first house to be built on the new site. The boy and the girl must take part ceremonially in each operation of building the hut. After that they together ignite (*oku tiafula*)[7] the new fire. A hen and a cock are killed, cooked on the new fire, and eaten inside the *etambo* by all who have taken part in the building. The headman and his wife cannot return to the old village but must camp at the new site (*itula*) and keep the new fire alight. In building their houses, the villagers may commute (*oku usala*) from the old site, but often the distance is too great to do this, and

[1] Of Ciyaka, ordained pastor of Elende Church in 1930. He was Hambly's chief informant.

[2] Sekulu Upalandanda was the younger brother of Ngonga's father's father, and therefore grandfather to Ngonga.

[3] The bow (*ohonji*) of each ascendant who is now a guardian spirit (*osande*) of the family.

[4] When this first pole is cut, the axe should first be pointed toward the cardinal directions.

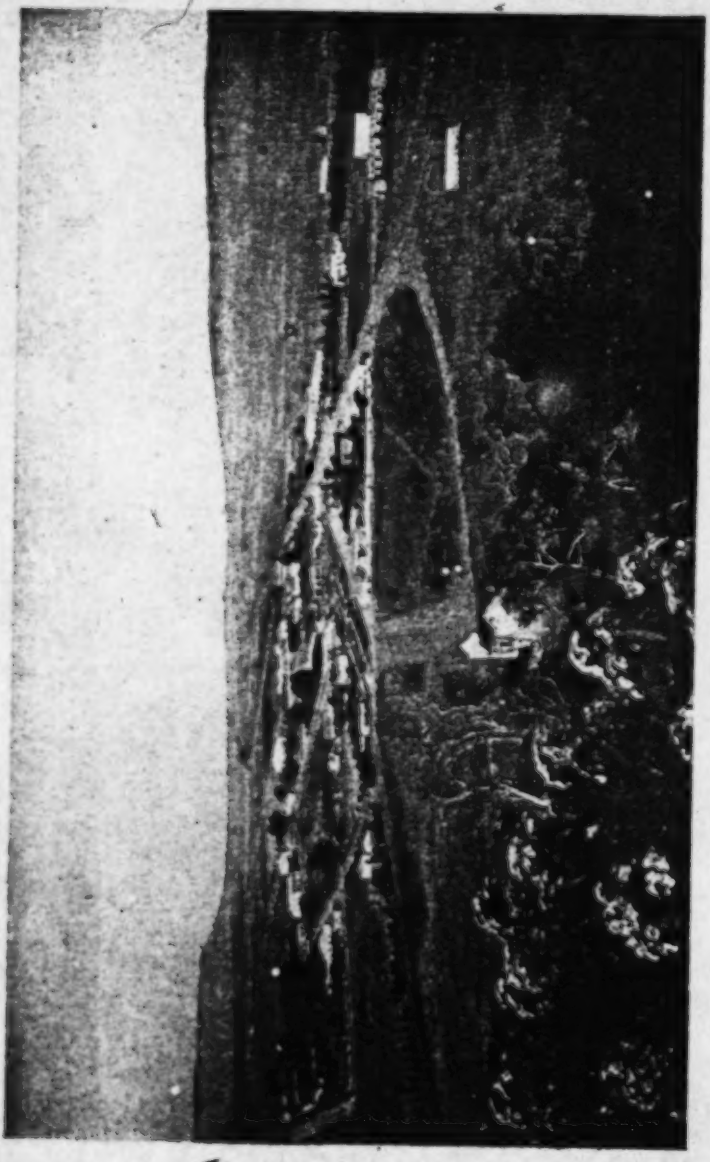
[5] A leaf of the *upu* tree is used in the divorce ceremony. Its use here is a sign of divorce from the old site.

[6] Literally, 'mud of the rainy season'.

[7] This was formerly done with a fire drill (*vide* Hambly, op. cit., Plate XXXV), but not for a number of years now. When I showed the above picture to a group of 150 young men of 17 to 25 years of age, not one of them even knew what it was.

1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP 13 Mbundu FP 13

PLATE XV



Bailundu: town of Teixeira da Silva

[Facing p. 176]

were polygynous and only one of these contain more than two wives.(1)

The village or imbo (plural *ovimbo*) may consist of from 5 to 500 such households, the heads of which are usually related agnatically to each other. Most, but not all, of the larger villages are *olombala* (villages of chiefs or sub-chiefs). These are said to have had formerly as many as 5,000 inhabitants,(2) but today few have as many as 3,000, and there is a general tendency towards smaller villages and even isolated households.(3) There are in general two quite different types of Umbundu village according to the terrain on which they are built. Those on the plains, where there is room to spread out, tend towards a circular shape, with the *ocila* and *onjango* (see below) near the centre. The various sections of the village may appear as quarters of a single whole, or they may be spread out haphazardly. Mountain villages(4) may have houses built on ledges almost one on top of the other. Here there is often no room or no suitable soil within the palisades for gardens or for the dancing-floor *(ocila)*, which are found outside the palisade. Different sections of the village tend to string themselves out horizontally along the mountain-side, or to find successive ledges.

The typical village of Ngendo described by Childs, in Kasongi chiefdom, *etumbu* (sub-chiefdom) of Ekongo, is of an intermediate type, built on a slope. Ngendo has 196 inhabitants, of whom 42 are men, 60 are women, and 94 children. The village is divided into four smaller sections or wards (*ovitawila* pl.), of which the largest, that of the village headman *(sekulu)* has 127 inhabitants, while the other three have 19, 13 and 37 inhabitants respectively. The word *imbo* (village) may also be used for either of the two larger sections by themselves. Each section has its own elder, but the dancing-floor *(ocila)*, which is the centre of village life, is in the headman's section. The *ocila* is primarily a place for recreation, but religious functions also are held in it, and formal cases tried. Formerly most villages had a second communal building, the *onjango* or "Men's Club House",(5) whose importance was almost as great as that of the *ocila*. Here all the men, youths and boys gathered for the evening meal, and here guests were entertained, lesser judicial cases settled, and the day's work and gossip discussed, while young boys, sitting in the background, gained much of their knowledge of tribal history and custom.(6) Today the *onjango* exists and maintains its former function chiefly in parts of Ngalangi, Viye and possibly Ndulu. It does not exist in Childs' typical village, where the "Men's Club" holds only occasional meetings on the rocks behind the headman's house, and where the common evening meal no longer takes place. The reason suggested for the disappearance of the *onjango* is lack of leisure owing to demands for road work (in the immediate vicinity of Ngendo), for contract labour, involving absences of from six months to a year,(7) and the difficulty of securing tax-money.

(1) And polygyny is thought to be more frequent here than in other areas. See above, p.23.
(2) According to Magyar, 1851.
(3) Childs, op.cit., p.25, fn.1. Childs does not suggest any reason for this tendency.
(4) Formerly many villages were built on mountains for defence, and capital villages of this type may still be seen.
(5) The "Men's Club" seems to be simply a gathering of all the adult men (and possibly also the juveniles) of the village.
(6) Childs, op.cit.; Cashmore, 1944; Hambly, (2) 1934.
(7) Most of the labour on the Benguella Railway is Umbundu, and many Ovimbundu travel to the Union of South Africa for work. (Childs, op.cit., p.10, *et.al.*)

Ngendo is surrounded by a stick palisade except on that side of the headman's household which is adjacent to the rocks used as a club-house. The village itself (and each section) is divided up into compounds, each of which contains one to three houses,(1) and palisades divide one compound from the next; between are paths leading to the *ocila* and out of the village. Small gardens for tobacco, maize and beans are within the compounds, and the larger fields lie outside the village at from thirty minutes' to an hour's walk. In the headman's section of Ngendo there are 25 households containing 32 houses in all. Each house has its own granary *(osila)* and a small chicken-coop built on stilts, and of all the houses only six have separate kitchens *(ocimo)*. Most households had separate pens for pigs, goats and sheep for the night,(2) and at one side of the headman's compound there is a common corral for the nine cattle owned by the section. Only the headman had a spirit-hut *(etambo)*, used also as a storehouse, for entertaining his guests, and for his own use should he wish to sleep apart from his wives.

Chiefs' villages or *olombala* (singular *ombala*) are often surrounded by a belt of tall trees.(3) The chief's compound (the *ilombe*) is larger than those of other villagers, and, according to Hambly,(4) usually contains: the chief's house, which always has a separate sleeping-room; a house and a kitchen for each of his wives; a tomb for the burial of the chief and his wives; a house of meditation for the chief, and pens for pigs and chickens.

Umbundu houses are usually circular, but sometimes rectangular, and made of wattle and daub, with thatched roofs. Sometimes huts are divided by matting into a living-room and a sleeping-room. Cooking is often done in the house itself, but sometimes a separate hut is built as a kitchen.(5)

The *onjango* (the Men's Club House) consists of a cone-shaped roof set on stout hardwood poles instead of a wall, and left open so that those for whom there may be no place inside may still see and hear what takes place within.(6)

Villages are moved when fields are exhausted and others are not available nearby(7) or, more often, when there has been illness or death in the village, which implies that some action displeasing to the spirits has been committed. (No information is available concerning the usual length of life of a village.) When the new site is chosen, the headman's fire in the old village is extinguished, and a procession starts, led by a boy carrying the sacred bows *(ohonji)* of each ascendant who is now a guardian spirit of the family (i.e. the *oluse*), and a girl carrying the sacred chest *(ocimbangu)* containing the relics *(ociye)* and the balls of iguana skin.(8) On arriving at the site the boy and girl cut and plant the

(1) In this section there were 13 goats, 20 sheep, 100 pigs and about 100 chickens. (Childs, op.cit. p.31) (2) Ibid.
(3) Hambly, (2) 1934, p.206 *et.al.* It was a custom of the Ngangela peoples to plant trees round the village and dedicate them to deceased chiefs. (See McCulloch 1950, p.68.) There is no evidence that the trees surrounding Umbundu villages have any ritual significance, although the custom may have been taken over from the conquered Ngangela peoples.
(4) Op.cit., p.208. (5) Ibid., p.10
(6) Childs, personal communication.
(7) Due often to European settlement. (8) See below, p.47.

On arriving at the site the boy and girl cut and plant the first pole, which is to be a part of the new *etambo* (spirit hut). The boy and girl must take part ceremonially in each operation of building the hut, and when it is built they ignite the new fire. A hen and a cock are killed, cooked on the new fire, and eaten inside the *etambo* by all who have taken part in building it. The headman and his wife must remain on the new site to keep the fire alight; other villagers may commute from the old village or erect temporary grass shelters on the new site. Houses are built by the occupants themselves, although men may give each other mutual help, for which there is a gift of food and beer. The *onjango* is usually built by the communal labour of all boys and men, and on its completion a simple ritual is performed to promote harmony within and to welcome the spirits, who are believed to sleep in the *onjango* and to take part in all discussions within it.(1)

The village group: composition

Childs describes the relationship of the villagers of Ngendo to each other as typical of Mbundu country. Most of the heads of households are related agnatically to their respective section-heads (who are presumably also related agnatically to each other, since the village is based on the *oluse* group); Childs does not however discuss the relation of section heads to each other or to the village headman. He gives a table in which the householders are divided into six categories according to their relationship to their various section-heads:

1.	Paternal relatives of section head:	Section A (headman's)	21
		" B	2
		" C	1
		" D	2
			26
2.	Maternal relatives of section head:	Section B	4
		" C	1
		" D	1
			6
3.	Sisters' sons (or daughters)(2)	Section B	4
		" C	1
			5
4.	Relatives by marriage	Section A	2
		" B	1
			3
5.	Relationship not definitely known	Section B	2
6.	Former slaves	Section A	1
		" B	1
			2

(1) This section is based on Childs, 1949, pp.37-9.
(2) Who could, of course, have been included as maternal relatives *and* paternal relatives, since they belong both to the *oluse* and to the *olusia*.

885 and stability of his personality (*unu* - lit. the quality of being a person) is only proved when he enters the state of adulthood at marriage.

DEATH

361 764 Each village has its own burial ground about a mile or so away. The grave is usually dug by the children of the father's sister.(1) The corpse of a commoner is bound in a supine position and placed in a box before interment. It is usual during the funeral to find out the cause of death, i.e. whether it is the work of spirits or of some living enemy. Accusations of sorcery are frequently made. The corpse in its coffin, slung to a pole between two carriers, responds to questions as to who 'ate him' by forward (affirmative) or backward (negative) movements.(2) In the case described by Hambly,(3) the questions were put by the father's sister. The corpse may also cause its bearers to stop in front of a certain house during the procession through the village, thereby indicating that one of the occupants has caused its death.(4) Should the corpse not give a clear answer, the diviner might be called in to discover the cause of the death. Accusations of sorcery, as has been noted above, are often made within the circle of kin.(5)

[759]

Special cases

766 For *children* the same ceremony was carried out if they were old enough to walk and talk. Otherwise the diviner's services were called upon by the parents. At the death of twins, the mother has to shake a rattle or blow a horn instead of giving the usual greetings to passers-by, as she had to do also while the children were alive.(6)

766 791 At the death of *diviners* and *medicine-men* other members of the profession take charge of the ceremonies. The corpse is tied in a sitting posture and kept thus for three days before burial. No coffin is used. The questioning ceremony is carried out as for a commoner. After the interment the other medicine-men dance "because they have spirit in their heads", and during the dance each eats a living chicken that he carries in his hand. At the side of the grave a dog, a chicken and a goat are killed, and eaten by the mourners. The *ocimbanda*'s power is apparently thought to linger round the grave, which the chief or village-headman may visit to ask for rain and other favours.(7)

224 766 *Hunters* at death are buried in rock tombs *(ombilia* or *osonje)*, which are usually placed in commanding positions. The skulls of animals which the hunter has killed are piled on top of the tomb. The bows of the deceased hunter are kept in his successor's "house of bows".

766 693 680 *Chiefs*, and possibly also *village headmen*, are buried in specially-constructed enclosures in the villages over which they ruled. The tomb is a small hut with a substantial wooden door, which is surrounded by a strongly-built wooden fence, or it may be a cave. The wives of the chief are buried in the same enclosure. The head of a specially selected

(1) Hambly, (2) 1934, p.268.
(2) Childs, 1949, p.57.
(3) Op.cit., p.266.
(4) Childs, loc.cit.
(5) Ibid.
(6) Hambly, op.cit., p.268.
(7) Ibid., p.270.

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

growth is under examination. This central plateau, the Benguela Highlands, rises in places to a height of 6,000 feet, an altitude which reduces the heat of the tropics and so modifies the flora, discouraging some types of vegetation and encouraging others. Hostility of the highlands to palm trees and the banana is appropriately discussed when dealing with cultural losses; while the fostering effect of reduced temperature and the presence of wide expanses of open country on the growth of maize and the keeping of cattle is a cultural gain.

The prevailing rains of Angola are from the northeast to the southwest; consequently the high plateau intercepts rain clouds which give an annual fall of sixty inches. This adequate rainfall is another factor which has affected economic life, density of population, communal welfare, and powers of expansion.

The villages of the Ovimbundu are built on hillsides having a commanding view of the surrounding country. There is in the nature of the land a natural protection from enemies. In addition to this the Benguela Highlands are an admirable base from which expeditions both predatory and commercial might, and actually did set out eastward to the interior of Africa, and southwest to the cattle-keeping country.

It is important to note that this central plateau is the watershed for four large river systems; the Kwanza to the northwest; the Cunene to the southwest; the tributaries of the Kasai to the northeast; and the Zambezi and its affluents to the southeast. Fishing, with attendant beliefs of a ritualistic kind, is of local importance; so also is the making of canoes. Moreover, the river valleys have marked out a natural means of communication in several directions.

In connection with the river system the biological factor of the tsetse fly is important, because the presence of the fly locally discourages human habitation and prevents the keeping of cattle. The exact distribution of the fly is imperfectly known, but *Glossinia palpalis*, the cause of sleeping sickness in human beings, also *Glossinia morsitons*, which carries disease to cattle, are both present along the Kwanza and parts of the other rivers (J. C. B. Statham, Through Angola, p. 294).

The western coastal strip is a region of great aridity which has in some years no rainfall whatever, because the northeasterly rains have expended themselves on the high plateau. This region displays vegetation of the semi-desert type; namely, baobab trees, prickly acacias, euphorbias, and aloes. Population in this area is sparse, always nomadic, and in some places non-existent. The coastal strip

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

567 people, especially if they were from outside the Ovimbundu, was one of absolute and abject servitude.

The master had rights of punishment including a death sentence; but Ngonga says that a slave could appeal to the headman of the village if he were starved and cruelly treated. All children of a slave became slaves of the master. As the slave had no property he could not pay a fine; the master would pay the fine then relieve his feelings by beating the slave. Instead of paying the fine the master might sell the slave.

Slaves were not branded or marked in any way. Ngonga has seen runaway slaves hunted with dogs. A slave was not allowed to buy his own freedom. A master could dispose of his slave girls in marriage; for instance, a young girl might be sold to an old man. The condition of the slave is well expressed in Ngonga's own words: "The slave worked hard at everything, then the master said he had done nothing."

Slaves used to go to war to fight with their masters against an enemy. A slave might become a blacksmith or a hunter, two very esteemed occupations, but all his work would be for the master. Ngonga says there was no slave market belonging to the Ovimbundu, but every man knew where he could buy a slave. Slaves could act as witnesses in a trial. Slave women were not lent out for prostitution. A slave owner did not have promiscuous intercourse with his slave women, but he chose two or three girls as concubines. A slave girl who was married to a free man would revert to her master along with her children when her husband died. If a master had married his own slave woman she would, at his death, become the property of his eldest brother and her children would go with her. In some instances the slave woman and her children would be given to the son of her master's brother.

[585] [768]

VILLAGE ORGANIZATION

361 When choosing a site for a new village, a preference is shown for a hillside, though woods or valleys are at times selected. The foot of cliffs is a favorite site. In addition to the shade afforded by the cliff there was in time past the advantage of being hidden from the view of enemies. Further shelter was afforded by the planting of wild fig trees. Sometimes an *ombala* ("capital") was rendered picturesque by the planting of trees which grow to a great size; such a plan was followed at the *ombala* of Ngalangi.

Caves in the wall of a cliff, likewise rugged hillsides, gave a place of retreat for women and children during an attack. Usually there

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

are small streams of pure water falling down the cliffs and hillsides. 361 ●
Near Bailundu and Ngalangi, villages still retain their defences which consist of high poles set in a trench.

Judging from sites visited at Elende there was a pre-Ovimbundu 172
stone-building culture. One of the sites has such a commanding 712
view over extensive plains and valleys that the position would be almost impregnable. At the present day the line of fortifications is well marked by stone walls three feet high. These are composed of boulders to which the builders had ready access on adjacent hillsides. Large stones were no doubt rolled from the slopes to the small plateau chosen as a building site. This small plain lies midway between the hill crest and the valley.

At present this old site, which is enclosed by lichen-covered walls, is overgrown by tall grass and trees attaining twenty feet in height. Photography would be uninstructive unless a preliminary clearance were made—a formidable task owing to the density of vegetation.

In the center of the enclosure is a group of transported boulders possibly marking the site of a place of assembly. A search among the long grass reveals stone slabs and cylindrical crushers which were used for grinding grain over a very long period, as may be seen by the wear on the base stone; some thick stones are so worn as to be almost perforated. Weather-worn stones that were probably used as scrapers, are to be found. Surface potsherds are of the material of which present-day Ovimbundu women make their cooking pots. These sherds mark the places now used by small nomadic bands, hence the surface pottery may have no connection with a pre-Umbundu culture.

In the vicinity of this walled stone village are hillside cairns marking the sites of graves. These have been robbed by medicine-men in search of material for their charms.

The Ovimbundu have no traditions regarding the site, neither is there legendary or other evidence to show that the Ovimbundu ever made their villages of stone. The raising of a cairn of stones over [764] the body of a hunter is, however, a present-day practice near Ganda and in the Esele country.

If a site cannot be systematically worked, it is better left alone until scientific investigation is possible. The preliminary clearance of grass and timber would be a long process. The archaeological material recovered from such a site would be of a uniform and simple kind. There is no evidence of anything beyond an elementary stone age culture.

361 At the present time one type of village is surrounded by stout stakes ten or more feet high, set in a roughly circular plan. The arrangement of alleyways within the village is complicated without following any symmetrical plan. A visitor sees only a labyrinth of passages between high poles, with here and there a rectangular wooden 417 gate at intervals along the passages. The door itself is made from 335 four stout heavy planks which are roughly hewn and as a rule undecorated, but occasionally I have seen the panels of a door carved with [531] designs representing the breasts of a woman; or there may have been simple geometrical patterns. The top ends of the door panels are massive spheres of wood bored through with holes. Through the holes in the tops of these panels a pintle is passed in such a way that the door is suspended from above. During the daytime the lower ends of the panels are raised to the level of the lintel. They are there supported on a Y-shaped upright which is erected in front of the doorway. At night the planks are removed from this support and allowed to hang downward in the doorway. There is a sliding crosspiece to push over the lower ends. The same arrangement is sometimes used to make a door for a hut. This old type of village doorway, common twenty years ago, is becoming increasingly rare.

342 The house of a king or a chief is larger than that of a commoner. 644 The enclosure which contains a king's house and the other buildings 621 is named *elombe*, while *epandavailo* is the word used to describe the entrance to this compound. The *elombe* is built by men and women who receive no payment. There is a ceremony when the compound is opened. The house of the chief, Kandimba Sanjahulu, near Bailundu, is rectangular, with mud walls raised on a platform of earth and stones. Whitewash has been applied to the outside of the walls and some ornament is given in the form of painted blue crosses. [113] Complete study of structural types and the planning of internal divisions has been made by F. and W. Jaspert, of the Städtisches Völkermuseum, Frankfort.

644 At a village near Cuma the house of the chief differed from the dwellings of commoners in being somewhat larger. The house had been abandoned, not because the chief died there, but because the chieftainship had been transferred to an adjacent village. The tomb, which will be described in connection with funeral rites, was a few yards from the house. This mausoleum was surrounded by a high wooden palisade, to a stake of which were attached the horns of an ox killed at the funeral feast, while the jawbone lay in the enclosure

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

(Plate XLV, Fig. 2). The house of bows for holding sacred relics will be described in connection with religion (Plate XLVI, Fig. 1).

In former days there used to be a hard mud floor for dancing, centrally placed in the village.

In the center of the village is the communal house where all men, and boys over four years of age, gather to eat their food, which is sent by the women. This *onjango* is the place of assembly for discussion of village affairs. A house of this kind at Bailundu is circular in form with a diameter of seventeen feet (Plate XLVIII, Fig. 1). In the middle of the *onjango* are stones forming a fireplace. In another such house there were jawbones of oxen. These were suspended from the walls as tokens of the payment of fines. There is no communal house for females. In some villages there is a common kraal for cattle.

The king's compound usually contains:

(1) The king's house, which invariably has a separate sleeping room.

(2) A house and kitchen for each of his wives.

(3) A tomb for the burial of kings and their wives.

(4) The house of bows for staffs, bows, mats, and tobacco-pipes of dead chiefs.

(5) A house of meditation for the king (Plate LXXXIX, Fig. 1).

(6) Pens for pigs and chickens.

The guest houses (Plate XLVIII, Fig. 2) that I have seen were not in the king's compound. Granaries, which are conspicuous in every village, have been mentioned in connection with food supply (Plate XLIV, Fig. 1). Each house has its own granary. I have noticed garbage pits containing corn husks and refuse from sweet potatoes, but there is as a rule no organized scheme for disposing of refuse; dogs and pigs are the scavengers. There is no particular place for defecation; people use the bush.

Every man has a knowledge of house-building. Women do not actually build, but, along with the children, they pour water into the clay pit and carry clay to the men who are plastering the walls. Ngonga says, "People would be surprised to see a woman building a house. They would call her a he-woman." Men help one another in house-building by giving reciprocal service for which there is a gift of food and beer.

A deep rectangular clay pit is made as close to the house as possible, and the children thoroughly enjoy puddling the clay with their

764 later in explaining the meaning of the articles which are contained
787 in the divination basket.

764 I interrogated my interpreter respecting funeral customs, and from these inquiries elicited the following information. Burial of the corpse takes place a mile or more from the village in a grave dug by the father's sister's children. The depth of the grave is about
• (361) six feet. Each village has its own burial ground. The woman who questioned the corpse carried a sleeping mat which would be used to spread on the bottom of the grave, though sometimes the mat is placed outside the grave on the mound of earth. Midway between Cuma and Caconda I photographed graves of the Ovimbundu (Plate XLVII, Figs. 1, 2). The articles on the graves were the poles used for carrying the coffin, a basket, broken gourds, and in one instance the horns of a bullock which was killed at the funeral feast. The horns were mounted at the top of an upright pole (Plate XLVI, Fig. 2). Ngonga said that the belongings of a well-to-do person would usually be broken and placed on the grave; the breaking is necessary in order to prevent theft. I could find no trace of the idea that property is broken so that its spirit will accompany the man to a world of spirits.

The corpse was in a wooden box covered with a thin piece of blue and white chequered cloth tightly wound about the coffin. Ngonga explained that the body was prepared in the following manner before it was placed in the coffin. The corpse was extended in a supine position with the thumbs tied, the palms together, and the hands on the pubes. The great toes were tied together and the upper arms were bound to the torso with bands of bark or cloth. The use of bark no doubt represents the older method.

764 At the funeral of a baby one of the grandmothers carries the
787 dead child to the grave on her back. The ceremony of questioning the corpse is carried out if the child is old enough to walk and talk. Ngonga said, "If the dead child was old enough to talk they think he will say something." If the child was unable to talk, the parents, accompanied by their brothers and sisters, would visit the medicine-man to inquire the cause of death.

766 There are a few special observances connected with the burial of twins. When the children were alive the mother had to shake a rattle or to blow a small horn instead of giving the usual greetings to a passer-by, and this she has to do at the funeral of one or both of her twins.

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

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HUNTER'S TOMB AND VILLAGE OF VASELE

Fig. 1. Tomb, near Luimbale. Fig. 2. Village, near Vila Nova de Sallus

[p.428]

6:Edwards E-5 (1955-1956)1962
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[1874-1911]

THE OVIMBUNDU UNDER TWO SOVEREIGNTIES

178 The great distinguishing mark of the Ovimbundu was their participation in the caravan trade. Some of the neighbouring people also engaged in trading journeys (e.g. the Chokwe) but in central Angola the dominant traders were the Ovimbundu by reason of their control of the routes to Benguela and Catumbela, a control which as Livingstone's narrative shows they tried for a while to turn into a monopoly.[43] With this must be linked 177 the greater readiness of the Ovimbundu to adopt European ways, marked by the general adoption of cloths for wear by at latest the mid-nineteenth century.[44]

3. *Economics and Social Structure*

101 This section will describe the economic life and social structure which marked the period of the rubber trade (1874–1911). 436 A genuine currency existed in the form of cloth, and fortunes 439 could be made in it. Serpa Pinto tells us of one Otjimbundu who made £3,500 by trading in the interior and that he had met many men who 'turned over capital of a thousand to twelve hundred pounds sterling',[45] presumably in trade goods since Portuguese currency did not circulate among the Ovimbundu. 361 At the capitals of the kingdoms genuine towns grew up. Magyar in the middle of the nineteenth century estimated that [162] 5,000 people lived at Bailundo[46] and the British explorer Cameron who had crossed Africa from Zanzibar says of Ekovongo, the capital of Bie, 'the town of Kagnombe, the largest I came across during my whole journey, being more than three miles in circumference. On arrival I was met by the 644 Kagnombe's secretary, chamberlain, and captain of the guard who wore red waistcoats as a sign of their dignity. The secretary was more ornamental than useful, being unable to write, but a subordinate, a black man and native of Dondo, was better educated and conducted the trade of Kagnombe with the coast'.[47]

[43] Ibid., p. 205.
[44] Ibid., p. 206, referring to Magyar as evidence.
[45] Serpa Pinto, pp. 161–2.
[46] Magyar, p. 391.
[47] V. L. Cameron, *Across Africa*, London, 1877. Vol. II, pp. 206–7.

6:Edwards E-5 (1955-1956)1962
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[1874-1911]

not now possible for field work to supply the gaps in the written material.[72]

The traditional kinship system had neither clans nor segmenting lineages. The patrilineal group (*oluse*) was localized in a village, the group head being at the same time a village headman. Patrilineal ties do not seem to have been recognized between villages.[73] This social independence of the agnatically united village was reflected in the surrounding palisade, in the close clustering of the houses (nowadays much more spread out) and in the village institutions of the dancing-floor and the men's house (*ondjango*). It was here that all the men and boys, from seven or eight up, ate. Hastings writes, 'Each woman, after preparing the meal, takes or sends the portion which is for the male members of her family. This food is common property. As soon as enough has arrived some responsible member among the men will have it divided among the boys. For days a man may never taste of the food which is prepared by his wife.'[74] The men's house was also a club, and a court-room, where minor cases were decided. It was through this localized body of patrikin that an individual claimed land and residence rights and through it that he participated in the political system.[75]

The matrilineal group (the *oluina*) was composed of the descendants of a common great-great-grandmother.[76] According to Childs, it had a head who might also at times be a village headman,[77] and it was presumably the matrilineal group head who settled the disputes over property which Hambly says

[72] For an attempt at reconstructing Umbundu kinship on the basis of Childs's book see J. A. Barnes's review of *Umbundu Kinship and Character* in *Man*, 1950, pp. 126–128. It may be mentioned that the terms 'the side of the bow' and 'the side of the basket' are used simply to mean 'patrilateral kin' and 'matrilateral kin' (Dr. Childs, private information, and my own inquiries).

[73] A rather ambiguous phrase in Childs p. 43 ('The *oluse* consists of a large number of local village groups'), which might be interpreted as meaning that villages were patrilineally grouped into clans, seems really to mean simply that the village is the *oluse* unit.

[74] Hastings, p. 77.

[75] Ibid., p. 16. Childs, pp. 43–44.

[76] Hastings, p. 83, states that the matrilineal group consists of the descendants of a common great-great-great-grandmother (that is, five generations), and on p. 91 says that it consists of a group 'linked by a common great-great-grandmother'.

[77] Childs, p. 44.

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FP13 Mbundu FP13

'robber-baron', established himself[21] and in 1904 there was a minor rising against the Portuguese[22] (not to be confused with the very extensive Bailundo war of 1902–3). In 1908 the government post was founded for Bimbe, and in 1928 the Catholic Mission was established at the point where the Bailundo Mission had the furthest flung catechetical school in that direction. In 1927 the first trader had settled at Chicunda.[23] The areas under the mission and the post do not coincide, but it may be said that Bimbe is the territory bounded on the west by the River Cuvo or Keve and on the east by the main road from Bailundo to Gabela. The southern boundary of the post ran roughly on a line between the post and the Ponte Salazar (which bridges the Cuvo (or Keve) and takes the road into Cassongue), and the northern boundary is formed by a parallel line drawn from the road some way to the south of Cela to the river. In 1956 the post of Bimbe was divided; much of the western part including the Mission was placed under a new post Luvemba.

Chicunda is twenty kilometres beyond the mission, and seven kilometres beyond Chicunda a turning from the main track brings one to the village of Epalanga. Keeping on the track, a further bifurcation, say two and a half kilometres on, gives a track to the left which leads to a small leper colony, and a track leading straight on and sharply upwards to the village of the chief of Gumba.

This village lies at the summit of a sharp ridge which rises up from the ordinary level and then drops abruptly to a neighbourhood inaccessible to motor transport, which forms the greater part of the Gumba chiefdom. The boundary on the other side is a river across which lies Cela.

Such is the lay-out of the area studied. It is up in the north-western corner of the Umbundu country, indeed down by the Mission, people said that the people of Gumba were not Ovimbundu really but 'Olongoya', as the peoples to the north are termed. Many of the people in Gumba had come from

[21] Childs, p. 22.

[22] Information obtained locally. I did not see official records.

[23] Information obtained locally.

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Cela, and Cela influences are notable in several ways.[24] In Cassongue Umbundu has relatively recently ousted other speech.[25] Geographically Bimbe generally is rather lower than most of the Highland. Although the railway line and the growth of maize have been influential here, an alternative pull for labour migration is provided by the coffee plantation of Amboim and Seles, and by the coastal towns of Novo Redondo and Porto Amboim.[26] In the days of the caravan trade Novo Redondo was an important trading centre, more important perhaps than Benguela for the people of this area.

Work is sought by Ovimbundu in lands far from their home. There are Ovimbundu at Brazzaville; others have settled permanently in the Congo Republic, or work in Rhodesia; the Johannesburg mines have employed many, and some have gone as far as Natal.[27] In Epalanga, the village where I lived, there were two men who had been to Johannesburg—nor was this very exceptional and I am told that among the people south of the railway it is quite common.

The world picture of the Ovimbundu is vague, except as regards Angola and the neighbouring countries. The existence of Europe (Putu) composed of different nations Portuguese, French, and English is known, and I was several times asked if there were black people in England. Little or nothing is known of the other continents. The island of S. Tomé in the Atlantic is known, since up to recently Angolan labourers went there, and some convicts are still sent to it. Several people from the neighbourhood had lived in Luanda or worked on coffee plantations in northern Angola. The Belgian Congo was known as Bula Matadi, though people seem little aware of Rhodesia, and Mozambique (Portuguese East Africa) is confused with the southern Angolan port of Moçamedes. The railway lines and the cities along it are of course well known, and some of the people I knew had travelled to Kwanyama country in the far south of Angola to buy cattle. Johannesburg (Zhwaini) and its

[24] Notably in the arm ornaments and hair styles favoured by some women. Cela diviners are often consulted.

[25] Childs (p. 179) suggests that the change came about in the nineteenth century.

[26] For this area of Angola see Egerton, pp. 186–8. Galvão and Selvagem, pp. 378–80, 457–8.

[27] Personal information. Also Childs, p. 215.

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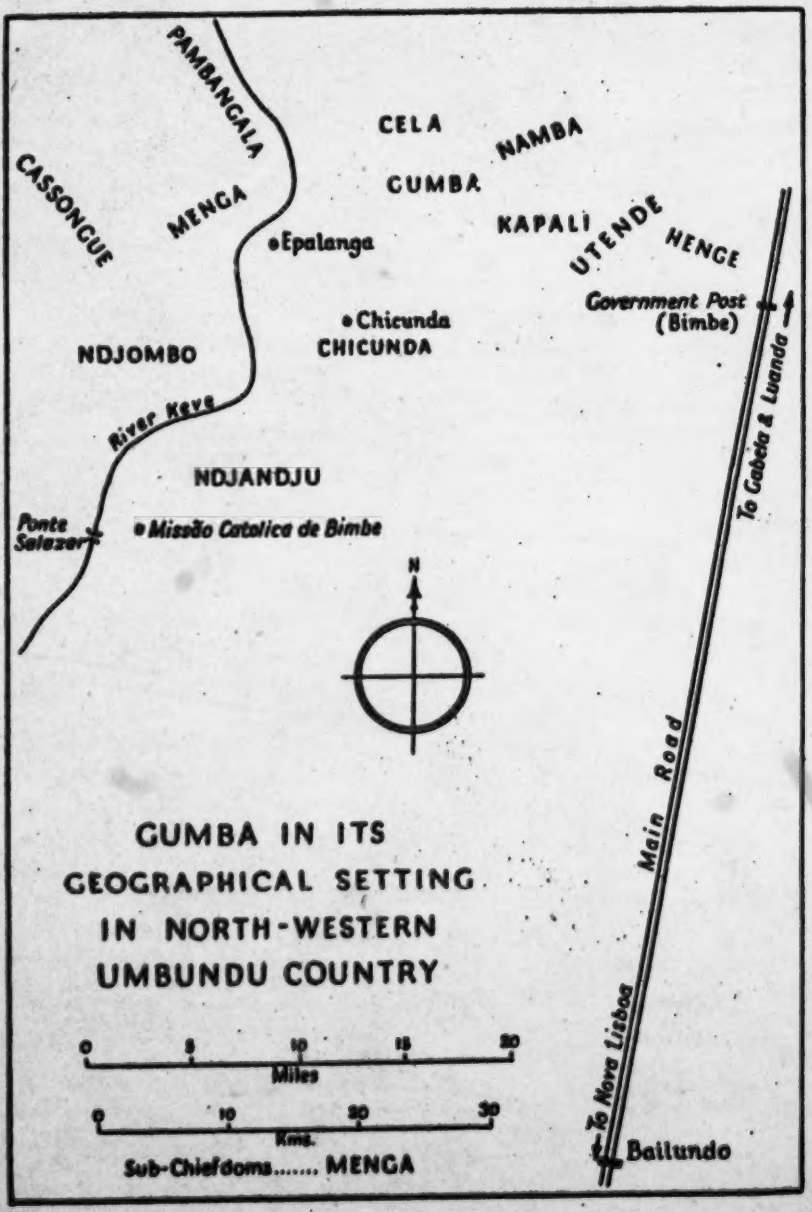

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622 villagers a certain, not very marked, respect, which may be increased by such factors as kinship ties between him and them, and his personal qualities.

621 Nor is the village itself clearly defined as a social unit. It does not possess any corporate rights over fishing and hunting sites, or control access to firewood gathering. A man may hold land in two villages. It is rarely that a village acts or is treated as a unit. The two main occasions on which the village is thus 'represented' are at marriages and in the context of the catechetical school. The party which goes from the bridegroom's [628] village to the bride's represents her village, to the other village; at the wedding feast food is given out on large basket plates, one for each village represented among the guests.

797 The role of the catechetical school as representative of the village as a whole will be discussed in another chapter; here it should be noted that the ceremonial reception of visiting missionaries by the 'school people' of the village has been evidently copied to some extent from the welcome given to the bridegroom's party, and this has in turn copied certain features from the welcoming of missionaries—notably the use of speeches in Portuguese.

361 The hamlets[30] and isolated households do not indicate a modernizing 'individualistic' trend away from village life, since 'conservative' and 'progressive' people are to be found in both units of residence. The Ovimbundu, whether educated 621 or illiterate, when talking about themselves (particularly in 829 comparison with the Kimbundu of Northern Angola) emphasize that they are a village-dwelling people, and for them the real values of village life seem to be the sociability and mutual help that a man living among his kin can enjoy. By settling in a village one indicates where the pull of kinship ties is strongest rather than any particular allegiance to the village headman.

[30] I use this term for a settlement with less than four households.

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CHAPTER IV

THE INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF VILLAGES

1. *The Village Epalanga*

In this chapter the internal social relations of the village and the relevance to them of the headman will be examined.

Epalanga, which has been mentioned as associated with Sapapula, the Epalanga of the former chief Kafelo, was a village of 148 inhabitants living in 36 households. Its houses stretched from near the River Keve (or Cuvo) to near the track leading to Chicunda, a distance of between half and two-thirds of a mile. Its layout is of the untidy scattered sort typical of most Umbundu villages, indeed its size leads it to be more scattered and spread out than is usual. Houses are surrounded by their own gardens in which maize and other crops are grown, and there are a number of stretches of bush in between homesteads.

Four main sources of origin (as regards kinship ties not as regards localities) for Epalanga may be noted. The largest 'kinship core'[1] was composed of Sapapula and his kin numbering 16 households. The second largest was that of the kin of Mwehombo (who was a matrilateral 'brother'[2] of Sapapula) and Mbati the former chief of Gumba and mother's brother

[1] This term seems more satisfactory than 'cluster' which has a local meaning, or 'group' which suggests an unilineal descent group. It is not intended to give a term indicating a unit with defined boundaries. Childs notes that *imbo* (village) can also be used as a word for a cluster of houses within a village. He also gives the word *ocitanda* for a ward within a village. This word was not known locally.

[2] I have employed inverted commas to indicate classificatory use of terms which for European refer to the members of the elementary family, e.g. matrilateral 'brother'. I have not done so where the classificatory use relates to a term not associated with the elementary family, e.g. mother's brother. In ordinary social life there is no great distinction between a 'true' and a 'classificatory' mother's brother.

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[Village of Epalanga]

621 of both Mwehombo and Sapapula. The third grouping was that of Ndjoleya (who was not directly related to Mwhombo or Sapapula) and his kin. Finally there were some people who were linked to Lusase (chief of Gumba 1954–6) who was not and had apparently never been an inhabitant of Epalanga, plus a few individuals who cannot be fitted on to any kinship core.

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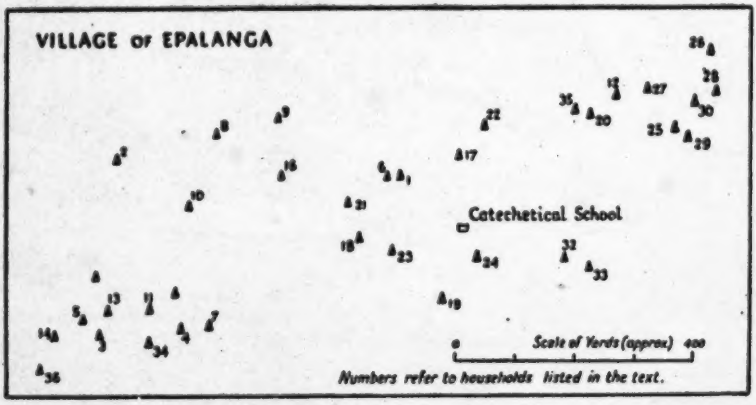

621 To some extent these differences of origin tended to be represented in the lay-out of the village. Sapapula's kin lived at the end of the village nearest the river, the kin of Mbati and Mwehombo lived in the centre of the village, and Ndjoleya's kinship core was to be found at the end of Epalanga by the Chicunda track. However, comparison of the list given below with the plan of the village show that the correspondence between core membership and the part of the village resided in is by no means total.[3]

In actual social life the differences between the cores to a large extent disappears. People from all cores take part in such activities as dances, funerals, house-building, and hunts, and this is facilitated by the numerous ties of kinship and marriage which exist between members of the different cores. Ndjoleya's

[3] Thus, Sendje, Sapapula's wife's mother, lived at Ndjoleya's end of the village. Ndjoleya had formerly lived at the other end of the village, but had moved. His 'sister', Tjingonene, still lived near his old home.

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ing home from labour in October wants cleared fields to sow. If he cannot find any kinsman who would give him a cleared field he will have to buy one, and will have perhaps to pay 200 escudos (£2 10s.). A man retains his rights to fields in a village he no longer inhabits.

The Ovimbundu keep cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, and fowls. The cattle are not milked but are used in sacrifices, and for fines; some have been brought by Ovimbundu from Kwanyama Ambo country but they do not seem to thrive in this neighbourhood. Sheep are few. In my village goats were much less numerous than chickens or pigs. The traders and European residents buy cattle, chickens, and pigs.

Fishing and hunting are practised, but despite the ingenious fish-traps, nets, poisons and weirs used for the first, and the popular enthusiasm for, and ritual associations of the second, neither dominates the actual food supply and ecological background in the way that maize does.

The Ovimbundu believe that the dry-season grass fires also help to fertilize the soil by leaving ashes. Ashes are sometimes spread in a village garden, and dry grass may also be left in a field for this purpose. Soil beside trees is considered to be especially rich, as to some extent are the sites of former villages. There is no idea of crop rotation and a field is worked for as long as it is fertile, that is indefinitely for an *onaka* and from three to six years, sometimes more, for a field of the *epya* type. The hoe is still the standard means of cultivation and the plough is a rarity.

Coffee-growing on any scale is usually undertaken by people living away from the villages, except for the Protestants who have been encouraged by their missionaries to plant coffee in their villages. Coffee, like maize, is bought by the traders. However, at least two local coffee-growers sold their coffee at Porto Amboim on the coast to get a better price. Basically, the agricultural economy of the neighbourhood is based on maize, grown by methods of shifting cultivation. The frequency with which villages rise and fall and individuals change from one village to another is entirely consistent with this type of agriculture.

Axe and hoe blades, blankets, cloths, clothing, cutlery,

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CHAPTER VI

THE CATECHETICAL SCHOOL

797 Both the Catholic and Protestant missions have, in order to provide religious teaching and leadership at the village level, made use of catechists whose responsibility it is to prepare people for baptism and children for Communion by teaching them catechism, to lead the village people in prayers, and to maintain contact with the missions. There are a number of differences between the roles of the Catholic and the Protestant catechists. As most of the Christians in my immediate neighbourhood were Catholics, I shall deal in this chapter with the Catholic catechists, though I shall indicate some of the differences which the Protestant organization shows.

[166] In the early days large numbers of Christians settled round the missions. The first Catholic converts were slaves purchased from traders by the missionaries and settled in villages near the missions. While the Protestant missions did not do this, they were somewhat embarrassed by the large crowds of converts who settled round mission stations.[1] The missions expanded by sending out catechists who gathered converts. At one time the practice was for the Christians to settle in a 'school village', which was in fact a hamlet partially separated from the rest of the village from which its membership was recruited. This is still found in some Gumba villages. In other villages, however, there is no geographical division between Christian and pagan, and the school may occupy a central position in the lay-out of the village. There are as yet no purely Catholic villages in Gumba. These are established by the missionaries when there is considered to be a significant number of Catholic married couples. This pattern is followed even on the outskirts of Nova Lisboa.

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[1] Childs, p. 68.